

SYNTHESIS DOCUMENT

--

Philosophy and Praxis of Non-Violent Direct Action. From (past)
Indigenous Resistance To (present) Environmental Campaigning In
Aotearoa – New Zealand

--

Authored by Shai Naides

UAB – Ciències Ambientals

INTRODUCTION

This political ecology project is an initial approximation to the nature of nonviolent tactics and strategies in environmental campaigning and Indigenous resistance movements.

A standard definition of political ecology is that it's the study of the relationships between political, economic and social factors with environmental issues and changes. Political ecology differs from apolitical ecological studies by politicizing environmental issues and phenomena. The politicization of an environmental issue,

specifically, sits in the centre of the case studies used in this project in order to analyse the philosophy and praxis of Nonviolent Direct Action (NVDA) – that is in both, modern environmental campaigning and historic Indigenous resistance to colonisation.

STRUCTURE

3 main parts compose the project, which are the focus, the background and the interpretation. The focus is Te Whānau-ā-Apanui's campaign at sea to disrupt Petrobras' seabed mapping survey. There's a small introduction about Te Whānau-ā-Apanui, a deep dive into the actual activity of deep sea oil drilling and its risks in both an international and national context. The last part of the focus is a thorough description of the events throughout the flotilla campaign out at sea and a detailed explanation and analysis of the tactics, communications and storytelling elements involved, all in the context of NVDA in environmental campaigning.

The background section has a first part that describes the story of Parihaka, and a second part with in depth analysis of the characteristics the passive resistance tactics or NVDA show.

The interpretation creates the space to contrast the use of NVDA in both cases and intends to identify the common characteristics within these. Lastly there's a section on NVDA in Indigenous struggles and in the realm of digital communications, which tails into the last part, the final conclusions.

THE RISKS OF DEEP SEA OIL DRILLING

Regarding the actual activity of deep-sea offshore oil drilling, the 5 main pillars to describe the limitations and risks both generally and in the specific case of New Zealand / Aotearoa offshore operations are:

- 1) Technical limitations and inexperience
- 2) Human error
- 3) Treacherous conditions
- 4) The isolation of deep-sea rigs
- 5) Overview of blowout accident statistics

NON-VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION IN BOTH CASE STUDIES

To analyse the philosophy and praxis of NVDA, I took a journalistic approach to the cases of Te Whānau-ā-Apanui resisting Petrobras, in the New Zealand East Coast in 2011, and that of Parihaka resisting British Colonisation, in the New Zealand West Coast in the mid-19th Century. The first was done through press releases and their use in a modern campaigning context and the second through historic record of the events. Once the events had been searched and documented I was able to identify, for each of these, the key elements of the utilisation of Non-violent Direct Action as a means to achieve specific goals.

Petrobras is a Brazilian oil giant that intended to run a 45-day to 60-day survey campaign to determine the best locations to initiate exploratory work on the East Cape of New Zealand. After a 7-week campaign at sea by Te Whānau-ā-Apanui – the local and opposing tribe, Petrobras left the Raukumara Basin (32 days in). The ins and outs of this campaign are fully detailed in the analysis of the press releases, with a special focus on the direct communications the coalition of environmental groups and tribal leaders feed to the media and how these were directly connected to the legitimization of the NVDA's.

The main tactic utilised during the campaign was to disrupting the *Orient Explorer's* surveying trajectory – this consists in placing people right in front of the ships trajectory during their sonic surveying. Surveying through high-decibel explosive impulses to map the seafloor geology requires a grid system through which the survey ship needs to go straight through specific x,y coordinates without changing the trajectory.

This is the one simple way of disrupting this activity – not only does it potentially tamper with the actual operation by disrupting the necessary process to attain good quality data, but it also generates loss of time and subsequently of capital. Having ships of this type out at sea for survey purposes is highly costly and this specific tactic affects the activity by making it more costly.

This tactic was utilised repeatedly and triggered reaction from the Government. This reaction was to send the Navy in to monitor the protest flotilla – which in effect seemed to only legitimise the protest, as a multinational corporation was being

protected by the Navy's big and armed ships, from locals that interrupted the surveying and followed the survey ship with their flotilla of small boats.

A few months after the survey ship left the Raukumara Basin, Petrobras returned their exploration permits to the New Zealand Government, breaking a 5-year permit agreement they'd settled.

In the case of Parihaka, the identification of NVDA was undergone thanks to the existing documented story. This story of resistance is very different historically and resource-wise to that of the Raukumara Basin.

The story of Parihaka is the story of a Maori community that utilised NVDA as a tactic and strategy to resist British colonisation. Despite this form of resistance being often coined as passive resistance, it's worth noting that these tactics where in reality very active, this is why direct action might just be a closer way of describing what actually happened in Parihaka. This story is one of massacre and defeat of Māori resistance to British colonization of Aotearoa. But it's also one of the first examples in the use of passive resistance to colonial forces, by Indigenous communities.

Parihaka's leaders chose NVDA as a form of resistance due to several reasons. Two of which were Christianity, a belief and deep knowledge of the Christian God, the moral high described in the bible, and the need to innovate forms to resist the growingly regular land grabs from the colonising force, especially as violent resistance had proved to only bring death. This form of resistance manifested in two main tactics which where sequenced and directly related.

Firstly, surveyors of the Crown had to document the land that would be claimed, and as a form of resistance to the surveyors, who effectively trampled on Parihaka's cash crops, the leaders ordered the men of Parihaka to plough the land, which had not been ploughed. Surveyors could only claim by law all land which was not ploughed in order to sale it for agricultural activity.

The second was that of a blockade by fencer who stopped a road from being created. Both these were impactful actions where the men of Parihaka never opposed any violent resistance. The orders where clear, always work towards the tactic that's being collectively undertaken and in case of confrontation, to pose no resistance.

The third case was that of the military occupation of Parihaka, where a militia of more than two thousand armed men ready for battle entered the village, and found a greeting of dancing women and food brought by the community's youth.

Both the Te Whānau-ā-Apanui and Parihaka resistance campaigns where nonviolent in nature, disruptive to the coloniser, and posed an unexpected cost which was greater than that of utilising justified violence by the party with more power.

Furthermore, both cases prove that utilising nonviolent direct action supports the dissemination of the story and creates a sense of moral high that can provide legitimacy to the actions taken when bearing witness to an environmental injustice or resisting a militarised opponent.

INDIGENOUS STRUGGLE and DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Indigenous struggles around the world were, in the past, isolated in silos of resistance with no support other than that from potential local allies. But times have changed, a globalized world and the very struggle of Indigenous communities globally has created a new landscape, one of global solidarity and opportunities of sharing knowledge, tools and tactics.

The main themes and pillars that run through Indigenous nonviolent movements with environmental justice struggles embedded, can be identified as:

- The need of safeguarding Natural resources, land and water.
- The role they have as stewards and guardians of the land and water
- Their understanding of this response as part of their cultural heritage and understanding of the universe i.e. cosmovision
- The call for action and support from all, regardless of their cultural background or location. This can be seen in the Parihaka case with European-friendly and inviting actions and in contemporary cases through global solidarity movements.

There's been historic use of NVDA throughout Indigenous movements and struggles with an environmental justice component adhered to it, and this continues being a reality. In fact it would seem reasonable to point out that all effective modern resistance movements have a nonviolent ethos behind them, and environmental

struggle adhered, and find solidarity, support and amplification of their communications via other connected struggles – whether of indigenous nature or not – thanks to the tools and channels of a modern globalized world.

When speaking of digital communications, this vector of study is one that we constantly see innovation in. Every other month a viral video, creative communication or Internet trend shows up with a new form of communicating and raising awareness in social, environmental or other types of campaigning.

We live in a growingly globalized world where bearing witness and the fact that hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people can find out what is happening in a given moment and place of the planet has been a game changer.

From tipping point campaigning organisations to social media campaigns, it's no longer necessary to run a high profile political lobby campaign to achieve wins in a cause. Through listening at the online conversations, amplifying messages and focusing the attention of people to an event, we can affect decision-makers and brands, as they too have an online identity. And this makes them more susceptible to people power while people have more tools and means than ever before in history to organise and utilise them.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The case studies of Parihaka and Te Whānau-ā-Apanui give a notion of how a resisting community can utilise NVDA to achieve victories and goals in their campaign, regardless of whether this resistance is part of an organised environmental groups coalition or the resistance to (colonial) neoliberal policies and the entry of multinational corporations.

The philosophy of Non-Violent Direct Action, as a system of thought, seems to be growingly present in global upraises. It is often communicated that a march, protest or action are being undergone in a peaceful manner, this seems to be a first step to legitimise the activity and advocate for the principles of democracy and civil rights. Despite it's name, and as mentioned previously, nonviolence does not necessarily mean passive. In fact all tactics analysed in the case studies are active, known as direct actions. These direct actions can be perceived, and often are, as aggressive by the agent target of such tactics. And this, in fact, is one of the objectives, to foster the tension that will shift the status quo and force a change or movement of positions.

The praxis of Non-Violent Direct Action has evolved and will continue doing so. As described in the vector of study around Indigenous struggles and the effects of a globalised world and era of digital communications, we can acknowledge that movements are converging and collaborating at a scale and breadth never seen before.

Regardless of the moral stance one might take when thinking about the use (or being confronted by) Non-Violent Direct Action, it should be noted that this tactic and

strategy is growing its presence in social movements of all colours and shapes due to its effectiveness. The reaction of corporations and Governments around the globe is proving this.

Laws are being put in place to criminalise peaceful protest in order to reduce their number and frequency, and this generates a sense within resisting communities that utilising this tactic and strategy is working, for it is fostering the necessary stress to change the status quo.

In light of the research undergone for this project, it can be said that the philosophy and praxis of Non-Violent Direct Action is growing in presence throughout social movements, like Indigenous and environmental struggles.

While these movements converge in new ways, they also relate to the rest of the world's population in a more inclusive way, partly due to a paradigm shift triggered by a change in the technological reality, which has brought global communications and digital democracy to more and more people around the planet.